MODERN DEMOCRACY

AGAINST

THE UNION, THE CONSTITUTION, THE POLICY OF OUR FATHERS, AND THE RIGHTS OF FREE LABOR.

SPEECH

OF

HON. HENRY WALDRON, OF MICHIGAN.

Delivered in the House of Representatives, April 26, 1860.

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The Thirty-sixth Congress has reached the fifth month of its first session. It assembled in this Capitol with great and varied interests demanding consideration and attention. The public creditors impatiently awaited our coming, for they were on the verge of bankruptcy, and had long served without their just remuneration. The plighted faith of our Government was to be redeemed. The men whom we came here to serve, were pressing upon our attention matters of vital importance. There were legitimate subjects of legislation before us, such as the admission of new States, the organization of new Territories, the homestead bill, the Pacific railroad, the development of our resources at home and the protection of our interests abroad. All these were subjects that properly commended themselves to the attention of an American Congress, and our constituents had reason to expect that they would receive fitting and careful consideration at our hands.

But, to the exclusion of all these matters, the "irrepressible conflict" breaks out. Before the sun goes down on the first day of the session, the subject of slavery is introduced by the Democratic party; and for eight long weeks an organization of this House was prevented by a discussion, in which passion took the place of reason, and vituperation was the substitute for argument.

While the Republicans in this body were in no wise responsible for that conflict, still, for one, I can say that the discussion was not unexpected; nor, more than that, was it unwelcome. Whatever is across our pathway may as well be reached and confronted at one time as at another. No man can close his eyes to the fact that there is a question now agitating this land, before which questions of finance and tariffs, of protection and improvement, dwindle into insignificance. It is a question which cannot be settled by compromises, nor dodged by time-serving expedients. It must be met fairly and squarely, and in the light of reason, justice, and humanity, receive its determination and abide its settlement. That question underlies all party organizations, moulds every party policy, and goes to the root of all party controversies. It is a question whether the equal rights of men are to be affirmed in the legislation and policy of our Government, or whether the idea of an oligarchy is to be recognised, which protects the interests of a privileged class, at the expense of the toiling millions of our Confederacy. The vital, all-absorbing issue of to-day is, whether the Republic is to be perpetuated in the faith, the spirit, the practice of its found-

ers, or whether it is to be perverted in its policy and workings, to subserve the interests of a baneful aristocracy. Before that issue the counterfeit Democracy has quailed and succumbed; false to its name, faithless to its traditions, recreant to its professions, it is now the ally of capital against labor, the champion of caste and privilege against equality and right.

When I speak of the Democratic party, I refer not to the organization of the past, for that party once recognised the inalienable rights of man, and to its ears freedom had not become a hateful sound; but I speak of the Democratic organization of to-day, which has espoused the cause of the strong against the weak, of the rich against the poor, of the pampered capitalist against the hardy son of toil. I speak of the party which is compelled by the slave power to carry its black flag and to fight its political battles under the crushing burden of its wrongs. I speak of the party which would still further oppress and degrade those who are now low in the scale of humanity, and which would repress that sympathy for the struggling which a sentiment of benevolence or a sense of justice might prompt. It is of that party, as controlled by the slave power—doing its bidding, registering its decrees, supporting its policy, and sustaining its candidates—that I speak. I arraign it before the country as false to the policy of our Revolutionary fathers; as unfaithful to the obligations of our common Constitution; as disloyal to the integrity of the Union, and as the betrayer and vilifier of the honest industry of the land. These are the charges. Now for the proof.

First, the Democratic party is arrayed against the policy and teachings of the Republicans of the Revolution, as well as of the Republicans of to-day. The principles of our organization come down to us in the Declaration of Independence. The sentiments of hostility to bondage which we assert are but the echoes of the utterances of our fathers. They believed the institution of African slavery to be inconsistent with the genius and hostile to the spirit of the Government they had founded. When they framed the Federal Constitution, they thought it wrong to admit, by any word in that instrument, "the idea of property in man;" they regarded the institution of chattel slavery, as then existing among them, as a deplorable evil, and their legislation was with a view to restrict and confine it. And I here place upon record the sayings and writings of those men, as testimony to confirm my position, and at the same time place in striking contrast this modern Democracy as it bows down before the Moloch of human bondage.

The men of 1776 tell us, to use their own language, that "the people were struck with the inconsistency of an appeal for their own liberties, while holding in bondage their fellow-men, guilty only of a skin not colored like their own;" and the citizens of Georgia, in 1775, sent forth to the world the following manifesto:

"To show the world that we are not influenced by any contracted or interested motives, but by a general philanthropy for all mankind, of whatever climate, language, or *complexion*, we hereby declare our disapprobation and abhorrence of the unnatural practice of slavery, as (however the uncultivated state of the country or other specious arguments may plead for it) a a practice founded in injustice and cruelty, and highly dangerous to our liberties as well as lives, debasing part of our fellow-creatures below men, and corrupting the virtue and morals of the rest."

Mr. Chairman, if any Georgian to-day should stand over the graves of the men who placed this sentiment upon record, and repeat it as his own earnest conviction, he would be driven by the Democracy from his house and his hearthstone as a traitor to his party, or lynched as a felon and an outlaw.

George Washington was President of the Convention which framed the Constitution, and he was surrounded by men who were fresh from the councils and contests of the Revolutionary struggle; they had drank in the spirit of the contest, and they came together, as they expressed it, "to secure to themselves and their children the blessings of liberty," while they spared no occasion to denounce the evil, the wrong, and the curse, of human bondage.

Washington said "his vote never would be wanting for the passage of a law to abolish slavery." He writes to John F. Mercer:

"I never mean, unless some particular circumstances should compel me to it, to possess another slave by purchase, it being among my

first wishes to see some plan adopted by which slavery in this country may be abolished by law."

Mr. Jefferson declared, in 1774:

"The abolition of domestic slavery is the greatest object of desire in these colonies, where it was unhappily introduced in their infant state."

And at a later period of his life, as the result of more mature experience, he says:

"Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate, than that these people [the negroes] are to be free; nor is it less certain that the two races, equally free, cannot live in the same Government. Nature, habit, opinion, have drawn indelible lines of distinction between them. It is still in our power to direct the process of *emancipation* and *deportation*, and in such slow degrees as that the evil will wear off insensibly, and their place be, *pari passu*, filled up by free white laborers. If, on the contrary, it is left to force itself on, human nature must shudder at the prospect held up."

Patrick Henry adds his testimony, in a letter dated January 18, 1793:

"I believe a time will come when an opportunity will be offered to abolish this lamentable evil. Everything we can do is to improve it, if it happens in our day; if not, let us transmit to our descendants, together with our slaves, a pity for their unhappy lot, and an abhorrence for slavery. If we cannot reduce this wished-for reformation to practice, let us treat the unhappy victims with lenity. It is the furthest advance we can make toward justice. It is a debt we owe to the purity of our religion, to show that it is at variance with that law which warrants slavery."

And another eloquent and eccentric son of the Old Dominion (John Randolph) says:

"I give to my slaves their freedom, to which my conscience tells me they are justly entitled. It has a long time been a matter of the deepest regret to me, that the circumstances under which I inherited them, and the obstacles thrown in the way by the laws of the land, have prevented my emancipating them in my lifetime, which it is my full intention to do in case I can accomplish it."

And, now, where would these men of the olden time stand, if they were once more in the land they loved, and for which they labored? What fellowship would our modern Democracy hold with Thomas Jefferson? Where is the Democrat who dare announce as his political creed the sentiments of a Washington? Who in the ranks of that organization dare repeat the old republican doctrines of a Madison, a Henry, and a Randolph? What Democratic Convention will enunciate in its platform the great truths that our fathers blazoned forth in the Declaration of Independence? Mr. Chairman, none dare do it, except at the sacrifice of his party standing. The man who stands up and avows his belief and concurrence in the blood-baptized doctrines of our fathers, will very speedily find himself outside of this Democratic organization. That party spurns the teachings of sages and statesmen, as heresies and abstractions, and calls the Declaration of Independence "a string of glittering generalities." New lights guide their footsteps; new counsels govern their votes.

I have quoted the Democratic doctrine as expounded by Virginians of the old school. Now, by way of contrast, let me quote the doctrine of modern Virginia Democracy. On the 13th of January last, a gentleman [Mr. SMITH] who once filled the Executive chair in the Old Dominion, and who is now, as for years past, an influential Democrat, on this floor, was asked whether he repudiated the sentiments of the Revolutionary fathers on the subject of African slavery. His reply was:

"I will say, however, in the outset, that the gentleman refers to the sentiments of distinguished Revolutionary men, and asks me if I repudiate them. Sir, *many of those sentiments of course I repudiate.* [Derisive laughter from the Republicans.] *Many of those sentiments are false in philosophy and unsound in fact.*"

Another Virginian, at the other end of the Capitol, [Senator MASON,] admitted, a few days ago, that a new standard of Democracy had been erected; and he states the conclusions to which the new faith brings its disciples:

"What I meant to say the other day, and what I think I did say, was this: that because of the agitation by one portion of this Union on the question of the abolition of slavery, the mind of the South had been brought more deeply and considerately to ponder upon it; the mind of the South had been brought by that agitation to look further into the condition of slavery, and into the consequences that resulted from it; and I was satisfied that the mind of the South had undergone a change to this great extent: that it was now almost the universal belief in the South, not only that the condition of African bondage in their midst was the best condition to which the African race had ever been subjected, but *that it had the effect of ennobling both races, the white and the black.*"

And another Virginian on this floor [Mr. PRYOR] avows that the anti-slavery impulses of his State have been stifled, and that the "traditional ideas" of his an-

cestors have been "contravened," with the fact, to use his own language:

"Discovered and demonstrated, that negro slavery, instead of being an accidental evil, which men tolerate merely for want of a practical remedy, is an institution which exists in virtue of the most essential human interests, and the highest sanctions of the moral law."

I might multiply quotations and extracts, of undoubted Democratic authority, to show that the position of the Democracy is a living denial of the great truths and principles which underlie the foundation of this Confederacy; but the fact will not be disputed that it has changed its ground, and abandoned the path of its fathers, because, while they deplored the existence of slavery as an evil, to be restricted and discouraged, modern Democracy is compelled to subscribe to a contrary doctrine; namely, that slavery is an institution to be fostered and encouraged as a blessing to the black man as well as the white.

And now, having demonstrated that this party is false to the impulses and convictions which strengthened the faith and nerved the arm of our fathers, I proceed to show that it is also faithless to the obligations of that Constitution which was the crowning glory and result of their toil and suffering.

The second section of the fourth article of that instrument declares that—

"The citizens of each State shall be entitled to all the privileges and immunities of citizens in the several States."

Here is a provision which guaranties to the citizen of South Carolina the same protection, when in Michigan, which the sovereignty of Michigan extends to her own citizens; and, on the other hand, it entitles the traveller from the North to the "privileges and immunities" which attach to a Southern citizen under the shield of his own State sovereignty. It is a provision essential to and growing out of the comity and good fellowship which should exist between confederated States. But how is this obligation regarded and fulfilled in the different sections of this Union? Why, citizens of slave States can travel outside of those States with more safety and less risk than they can inside of them. The Republicans of the free North tolerate no institutions which are inconsistent with the spirit of the Constitution; they recognise the obligations of that instrument, and live up to them. But, on the contrary, we have witnessed in the slave States a striking down of the constitutional guaranties of the citizen, by enactments which contravene alike the letter and spirit of our common bond. Laws have existed for forty years, in some of the Southern States, which forbid the entrance of free citizens, under penalty of imprisonment and sale—laws which are a direct, an open, a palpable infringement of the rights of Northern men; and yet our Democratic Administration, whilst it clamors so loudly and persistently about the rights of American citizens in Mexico or some other feeble Republic, whose territory it covets, has not a word to utter in vindication of the constitutional prerogatives of the citizen on his own soil.

Every attempt which has been made to test the constitutionality of these laws has been resisted by force. The Constitution prescribes an arbiter, a tribunal, where the citizen may assert his rights as against the legislation of another State; and the Legislature of Massachusetts sent two of her most worthy citizens to Charleston, to test in the courts the validity of these laws. But these men not only set at defiance the plainest provisions of the Federal compact, but they refused them the privilege of bringing suit, even in a South Carolina court. The men who went there from Massachusetts, on a peaceful, a legitimate errand, were compelled, through fear of personal violence, to abandon their mission and leave the State; and the men who constitute the life, the essence, the perfection of modern Democracy, boldly avow the fact that this clause of the Constitution is a dead letter, and that the decisions of courts are nothing to them.

As an evidence of this fact, I call attention to the language which a Democratic Senator from South Carolina used during this session, when commenting upon this incident in the history of his State. He said:

"The State found it necessary for self-protection to pass these police regulations, to prevent those persons who were hostile towards us from manifesting their hostility by the transmission of their emissaries through the pretended rights of citizens, under the Constitution. The State felt it due to herself, to her own safety, to consider, and she was authorized to consider, that this was but another mode to bring that question before the Supreme Court, *where we did not know how it would be decided, nor did we care.* We knew

the right to pass such laws was inherent in the sovereignty of the State, and *we did not intend to submit it to any tribunal.*"

The State of Virginia has enacted a law which places the coasting vessel which seeks the refuge of her harbors under the surveillance of her police, and compels the vessel itself to pay the expense and endure the delay of an examination. And when this law is complained of, as unfair, unjust, and unconstitutional, Senator MASON replies:

"It is a police law of the State; and whether the State has a right to pass it or not, is a matter which *the State will determine for itself, and by itself.*"

Nor is the provision which I have quoted the only portion of our Constitution which this slave Democracy tramples under foot. We have sacred guaranties in that instrument in behalf of free speech, free thought, and a free press, and yet to-day Democratic postmasters rifle mails and violate the sanctity of private correspondence. To-day, a system of espionage prevails, which would disgrace the despotism and darkness of the middle ages. The newspaper which refuses to recount the blessings and sing the praises of slavery is committed to the flames. The press that refuses to vilify the memory of the fathers is taken by a ruthless mob and engulfed beneath the waters. The personal safety of the traveller depends, not on his deeds, but upon his opinions. And these outrages are daily committed under the rule of the Democracy, because that party has taken under its guardian care an institution which can only exist and prosper at the sacrifice and expense of the constitutional rights of the citizen. Where slavery is, there can be no free speech, no free thought, no free press, no regard for Constitutions, no deference to courts.

And, Mr. Chairman, as a further indication of utter disregard for constitutional right, look at the infamous enactment which the Democracy have placed upon the statute-book, in the shape of a fugitive slave law. That law not only makes charity a crime and hospitality a felony, but it strikes down the very safeguards of personal liberty. It creates judicial officers in express defiance of the Constitution. It offers them bribes to decide against the poor and the forsaken. It is a usurpation of legislation never conceded to the Federal Government, because the surrender of fugitives from service was an obligation imposed upon the States. It denies the writ of *habeas corpus* and the right of trial by jury—boons which were wrung from the hands of despotism by the blood of thousands and the sufferings of centuries. As a citizen of Michigan, I glory in the fact that that State has, by counter legislation, vindicated the sovereignty of the State, and protected the personal liberty of the citizen. Whilst the Democracy degrades itself to do the bidding of the slave power, the Republican party rises to a due appreciation of its mission, as the conservator of right and the defender of constitutional guaranties.

And, to pass along hastily to the next proposition, I shall convict this counterfeit Democracy of disloyalty to the Union of these States, by evidence which no man will attempt to impeach, for it comes from their own lips. While the Republican party clings with unswerving fidelity to the Union and the Constitution, the Democracy is as disloyal to the one as it is faithless to the other. This Hall yet echoes with the menaces of disunion which the accepted leaders of the Democracy thundered in the ears of their colleagues and constituents. The word has gone forth, that this Government cannot be a Government of a majority, expressing its will under the forms and requirements of the Constitution. We are told that when this Government is administered in accordance with the policy of its founders, "to establish *justice*," "promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of *liberty*," that then the parricidal arm of disunion Democracy will rend it in twain. You and I, Mr. Chairman, heard the gentleman from Georgia [Mr. CRAWFORD] declare:

"Now, in regard to the election of a Black Republican President, I have this to say, and I speak the sentiment of every Democrat on this floor from the State of Georgia—we will never submit to the inauguration of a Black Republican President. [Applause from the Democratic benches, and hisses from the Republicans.] I repeat it, sir—and I have authority to say so—that no Democratic Representative from Georgia on this floor will ever submit to the inauguration of a Black Republican President. [Renewed applause and hisses.] * * * * The most confiding of them all, sir, are for 'equality in the Union or independence out of it;' having lost all hope in the former, I am for 'INDEPENDENCE NOW AND INDEPENDENCE FOREVER.'"

And we heard his colleague [Mr. GAR-

TRELL] declare that when a Republican President shall have been elected—

"The time will have come when the South must and will take an unmistakable and decided action, and that then, 'he who dallies is a dastard, and he who doubts is damned.' I need not tell what I, as a Southern man, will do—I think I may safely speak for the masses of the people of Georgia—that when that event happens, they, in my judgment, will consider it an overt act, a declaration of war, and meet immediately in convention, to take into consideration the mode and measure of redress. That is my position; and if that be treason to the Government, make the most of it."

We also heard the gentleman from Mississippi [Mr. McRAE] speak for the Democracy of his State in a similar contingency:

"I said to my constituents, and to the people at the capital of my State, on my way here, that if such an event did occur, while it would be their duty to determine the course which the State would pursue, it would be my privilege to counsel with them as to what I believed to be the proper course; and I said to them, what I say now, and will always say in such an event, that my counsel would be to take independence out of the Union in preference to the loss of constitutional rights, and consequent degradation and dishonor, in it. That is my position, and it is the position which I know the Democratic party of the State of Mississippi will maintain."

And the gentleman [Mr. DE JARNETTE] who represents the Democracy of the Richmond district said to us, in reference to WILLIAM H. SEWARD:

"You may elect him President of the North, but of the South never. Whatever the event may be, others may differ; but Virginia, in view of her ancient renown, in view of her illustrious dead, and in view of her *sic semper tyrannis*, will resist his authority."

But it is useless to multiply quotations of this character. I shall give but one more, and that is important mainly from the fact that it comes to us from the State of Texas, a State which is hardly yet warm in the embraces of its sisters; a State which talks valiantly in one moment about arresting the wheels of Government, and in the next moment asks imploringly of that same Government for additional protection against the incursions of its border Indians.

The extract derives additional significance from the fact that it fell from the lips of a candidate for Speaker, who received the votes, not only of Southern but also of Northern Democrats. On the 27th of January last, the member from Texas [Mr. HAMILTON] said:

"Whatever may be said by some to maintain it at all hazards, I believe that a dissolution of the Union is this day upon us. The Union, sir, is being dissolved now. It may be in the power of the conservative elements of this House to arrest it; but that cannot be done by the election of a Black Republican Speaker. I believe that I represent as conservative a constituency as any gentleman upon this floor; a people who are as devoted to the Union; a people, sir, who have, I think, manifested that devotion by as much liberality and unselfishness, by yielding up what no other State in this Union has yielded, a separate and independent nationality, in order to participate in this Confederacy, which we all profess so much to love; and yet that same State, that same people, are now solemnly resolving that it is better that the wheels of Government should be arrested where they are to-day, and no organization ever effected, than that the candidate of the Republican party shall be elected, and placed in the Speaker's chair."

We well recollect, Mr. Chairman, that these disunion sentiments were uttered here, not only unrebuked, but that they were welcomed by the approving nods, the congratulations, the applause, of Democrats, both on this floor and in the crowded galleries. They have their parallel in kindred sentiments which are avowed outside of this Hall by members of the same organization. They boldly proclaim that if the coming Presidential election results as the slave power desires, then the election is binding upon them and upon us; but if otherwise, then they will dissolve the Union and tear the Constitution into fragments.

There may be men so craven in spirit that they will be deterred from voting their honest convictions by threats, but they are not found in the Republican ranks. The man who allows a menace to control his suffrage is only fit to be a slave. You have allies at the North who have sacrificed much of consistency, much of self-respect, much of manhood, in submitting to your dictation; and, perhaps, these mutterings of disunion may compel more concessions, more humiliation, from them; but the Republican party, laughing to scorn such menaces, and guided by the old landmarks which the experience of the past has hallowed, will travel in the old path, illumined as it is by conscience and by duty. If the popular verdict is against them, they submit cheerfully in the future as they have in the past. If the

popular verdict is against you, they entertain no apprehensions but that you will submit also.

I have but a few moments left, in which to refer to the position which the Democracy occupy in relation to the great interests of free labor in this land. In the contest between capital and labor, that party espouses the cause of capital. It no longer sympathizes with man, white or black, who is struggling to recover his rights or ameliorate his condition. If the car of human progress is to move on, it must move, not by the help of this Democracy, but in spite of it. When the toiling millions ask for homesteads on our vast domain, they are met by the jeers and taunts of this mis-named Democracy, and told that they constitute "*the very mud-sills of society and political government.*" When the white laborer would carve out his own fortune on the prairies of the West, he is told, in the words of the Richmond *Examiner*, that "the principle of slavery is in itself right, and does not depend upon difference of complexion;" or, as a Democratic Senator expresses it:

"The poor ye always have with you; *for the man who lives by daily labor, and scarcely lives at that, and who has to put out his labor in the market, and take the best he can get for it—in short, your whole class of manual laborers and operatives, as you call them, are essentially slaves.*"

Mr. Fitzhugh, in his book entitled Failure of Free Society, says:

* * * "*Slavery, black or white, is right and necessary.* * * * The slaves are governed far better than the free laborers at the North are governed. *Our negroes are not only better off as to physical comfort than free laborers, but their moral condition is better.*"—*Page* 98.

From the same book, on page 179, I quote the following;

"Men are not 'born entitled to equal rights,' *It would be far nearer the truth to say that some were born with saddles on their backs, and others booted and spurred to ride them; and the riding does them good.*"

Within the last few years, the homestead bill has received the sanction of the House of Representatives on three separate occasions, but it is uniformly strangled in a Democratic Senate. And the Democratic party, viewing that measure from its standpoint, and by the light of its modern doctrines and principles, is consistent in opposing it. The determination of that measure involves the issue whether our frontier Territories are to sink into communities of despots and slaves, or rise into republics of freemen; whether our Western territory shall be dotted with slave huts, the abodes of degradation and misery, or whether the pioneer's pleasant dwelling, garnished by flower and shrub, shall arise by the side of the stream, the home of contentment, refinement, and industry. This measure of "land for the landless" is an important element in the "irrepressible conflict" between opposing systems of labor; and whilst it is meet and proper that the Republican party espouses the cause of the hardy pioneer, who would make the valley echo with the cheerful sound of free labor, it is equally fitting and appropriate that the Democracy should take the side of the master, who would make the same valleys resound with the crack of the overseer's lash.

The conflict between capital and labor has ever been a fearful one. It has convulsed nations, shaken thrones, and caused blood to flow like water. Fortunately, in our day it assumes the phase of a peaceful conflict, in which political parties are the contestants, and the ballot is the effective weapon. On the one side is arrayed the Republican party, vindicating the dignity of free labor, and asserting the rights of the toiling millions; while its antagonist is a false Democracy, reviling the laboring man as a slave, and prostituting itself to the interests and purposes of a purse-proud oligarchy. The contest may be protracted, but the issue cannot be doubtful. Step by step the advancing columns of the Republican host move on, bearing in their hands the dearest interests of humanity, and cherishing in their hearts an abiding confidence in the justice of their cause, as well as in its ultimate success.

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